

By Dr. Derek Conte

Jeff held Kim's hand and guided her into the office. He was already a patient and was hoping we could help his wife, Kim, 51. Kim's countenance was rather downcast and gray, her eyes appearing fuzzy as if she could only give you part of her attention. She kept her head very steady as Jeff carefully monitored her movements. A very loving husband, Jeff had become extremely vigilant over the years, making sure he was always in position to steady or catch Kim when she went into one of her vertiginous spins. Even changes in the barometric pressure during storms were a threat. Because of her problem, Kim had lost her job and could no longer drive safely. She sat stoically during our interview, maintaining her composure in a new environment.

Kim's episodes could occur anywhere, at any time, causing nausea, vomiting and dangerous falls. This had been going on for almost ten years. She slept sitting up, never moved her head or turned over so as not to induce another spell, which included severe nystagmus, an involuntary batting of the eyes to one side. Kim complained of having a "full feeling in the head", "popping" in her ears, and a "ringing and roaring" sound at all times. Her hearing was rated at a 50% loss, bilaterally. She had gone to the doctor many times, at Emory and Vanderbilt, and visited several in one group specializing in vestibular disorders. Each came back with a different diagnosis. She was given valium and had her diet severely restricted in case there were any food provocations. Kim was not enjoying life very much.

In 2008, Kim was diagnosed with Meniere's disease, a condition affecting the Vestibulocochlear and Trigeminal cranial nerves, causing jaw pain, loss of balance, tinnitus (ringing) and "fullness" in the head. Beyond medication, the treatment options were: a device for altering pressure in the inner ear, surgery to sever the cranial nerves, or even the removal of an entire part of the inner ear that sent messages about body position to the brain.

In our exam, Kim showed a severe head tilt and grossly un-level shoulders. On bilateral scales her left side carried much more weight. Her right leg was short by $\frac{3}{4}$ " when in the supine position and her left leg was short by $\frac{3}{4}$ " when prone. Kim could not perform cervical range-of-motion tests due to the threat of immediate illness.

Weber's and Rinne's tests, with a simple tuning-fork, were done to distinguish between hearing losses caused by air obstructions and those caused by nerve damage. The tests were negative for nerve damage, so the hearing loss was likely due to an air obstruction in the ear canals and/or a blockage of the Eustachian tubes which allows for the equalization of pressure between the environment and the middle ear. This is a very simple but crucial matter: if the middle ear is under abnormally high or low pressure, it can distort structures of the inner ear responsible for equilibrium, causing Kim's symptoms.

Kim's seated pulse was 120 beats per minute, suggesting she was in pain and some distress. We began by gently adjusting the C1 and C2 segments of the upper neck, the sinuses, and released the Eustachian tubes. We saw an improvement immediately. She was able to turn over on the table and tilt her head back without much nystagmus or dizziness for the first time in years. Kim was overwhelmed by emotion, yet her pulse was now 90 beats per minute.

By the third visit Kim had had only one "bad day" in the previous ten and there was no nystagmus or dizziness. Kim smoothly turned over on the table, though Jeff continued to reflexively jump up from his seat ready to rescue her from a fall. By the 5th visit, large amounts of mucous were being discharged to the back of the throat from the middle ear and the hearing tests were normalizing. By the 7th visit, Kim reported she was 90% better, the remaining 10%, she said, was "the fear of having another spell". Today, after 12 visits, "the fear is gone" and Jeff is no longer worrying about Kim falling down. She has become the cheerful, pretty, outgoing woman she always was. Sometimes, the solution to our problem is surprisingly simple. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Dr. Derek Conte is co-founder of Chiropractic Specialists at 1154 Concord Road in Smyrna. For questions, call: 404-784-6008, or for more articles, photos and general info go to: drderekconte.com

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=inner+ear+pictures+of+vertigo&view=detailv2&id=6B2554B30382FD66865C4AD0F71CEAD7A17D928D&selectedindex=14&ccid=VEr9Auju&simid=607987127353739709&thid=OIP.M544afd02e8ee37157eb65ff8646e7debo0&mode=overlay&first=1>